

Can Pleasant Smells Relieve Stress and Anxiety?



Who doesn't feel stressed at times in today's complicated world? When it comes to relieving that stress, aromatherapy followers may have had it right all along. A new study published in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* suggests that relieving anxiety and worry may be as simple as taking a whiff of a fragrant scent.

Fragrance to Lower Stress Levels?: The Study

In this study, researchers exposed rats to stressful stimuli. One group of stressed rats was allowed to smell the scent of linalool, a naturally occurring chemical found in many plant species including scented herbs, citrus fruits, and a variety of fragrant plants. The other rats were stressed without being exposed to the linalool scent. The results? The rats that smelled the linalool didn't experience many of the biochemical changes associated with the stress response, while the control group did. It appears that the linalool scent modified some of the bodily changes typically associated with stress. They even found that the genes that are usually turned in response to stress (there are over 100 of them) weren't activated in the rats exposed to linalool.

Could Fragrance Reduce Stress Levels in Humans?

Of course, humans are a bit different than rats in their perception of stress, but this certainly deems further study in humans since it could be a natural way to reduce stress and anxiety without using drugs. The researchers are hoping to test a variety of scents to see which ones have the greatest effect on stress reduction. If certain fragrances can be identified to be effective, they could be packaged into extracts or essential oils for people to use in their homes to relieve stress and anxiety naturally.

Scent to Reduce Stress: It May Be Nothing New

Aromatherapists have long believed in the power of fragrance to lower stress levels, although up until now there's been little scientific evidence to support it. The power of scent has been used down through the ages to alter mood and create a calming effect. Some

fragrances that are often recommended to lower stress level is the scent of roses, lavender, geranium, jasmine, neroli, sweet orange, or ylang ylang. It would also seem intuitively that any fragrance that brings back memories of simpler times such as the smell of chicken noodle soup or warm cinnamon buns baking might have a calming effect on the mind and body

The Bottom Line?

Could fragrance be a natural way to lower stress levels? Future studies will hopefully identify what scents are best for relieving an anxious body under stress so more people can take a whiff of fragrance rather than endure the side effects of anti-anxiety medications.

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